



Thomas Lawrence Riggs

Dakota Images

Thomas Lawrence Riggs was born at Lac qui Parle, Minnesota Territory, on 3 June 1847. He was the son of missionaries Stephen Return and Mary Longley Riggs. As a youngster, he learned to speak Dakota under the influence of his father and the others involved in the study of Dakota at the Dakota Mission based at Lac qui Parle.

Thomas Riggs graduated from Beloit College and from the Chicago Theological Seminary, and he was ordained as a Congregationalist minister. After a year's work in the South, he decided to join the Dakota Mission to work with the Tetons and established the Hope Station on the west side of the Missouri River opposite Fort Sully, Dakota Territory, in 1872, under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions.

In the fall of 1874, Riggs began his well-known mission at *Ti Tanka Ohe* in the Peoria Bottom on the east side of the Missouri River. By 1880, this Oahe Mission extended to the Standing Rock area and had fifteen outstations. In 1883, Riggs opened a boarding school at Oahe Mission that continued to operate until 1914. Speaking and teaching in Lakota, Riggs lived close to the Indians, and in 1880-81, he was an active participant in the last winter buffalo hunt of the Teton of Cheyenne River, sharing in the humor, customs, and hard work of the Tetons during the hunt. In addition to his missionary work, Riggs, in 1889, began developing a herd of registered Herefords and added ranching to his occupations.

Riggs continued to supervise the work of the Dakota Mission until 1918, when ill-health forced him to resign. In retirement, he continued to be interested in the work and to attend church meetings. He died on 6 July 1940 at his home in Peoria Bottom, which is now under the waters of the Oahe Reservoir.

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